EUROPEAN RUSSOPHOBIA AND EUROPE'S REJECTION OF PEACE

Europe has repeatedly rejected opportunities for peace with Russia at moments when negotiated settlements were readily available. These rejections have proven to be profoundly self-defeating for the continent. From the nineteenth century to the present day, Russia's security concerns have been treated as moral transgressions rather than legitimate interests to be negotiated within a broader European order. This pattern has persisted across various Russian regimes, including Tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet eras. The core problem lies in Europe's enduring refusal to recognize Russia as a legitimate and equal security actor.

Europe consistently applies double standards regarding the interpretation of security. While Europe treats its own use of force and alliance-building as normal and legitimate, it construes comparable Russian behavior—particularly near Russia's own borders—as inherently destabilizing. This asymmetry has narrowed the space for diplomacy, delegitimized the concept of compromise, and made war more likely. Throughout history, Europe has struggled to distinguish between Russian aggression and Russian security-seeking behavior. Measures that Europe views as benign and defensive are often interpreted by Moscow as direct threats to its strategic depth.

THE ROOTS OF STRUCTURAL RUSSOPHOBIA

Western Russophobia operates as a structural prejudice embedded in European security thinking. It assumes that Russia is the exception to normal diplomatic rules. While other great powers are presumed to have legitimate security interests, Russia's interests are often presumed illegitimate unless proven otherwise. This assumption transforms policy disagreements into moral absolutes and makes compromise appear suspect. Consequently, Russophobia functions as a systemic distortion that undermines Europe's own security.

The origins of this structural failure can be traced to the nineteenth century. After the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, Russia was a central architect of the post-Napoleonic settlement. However, within a generation, British and French political culture began to treat Russia not as a normal power, but as a civilizational danger. Mikhail Pogodin's 1853 memorandum to Tsar Nicholas I captured this shift by listing episodes of Western imperial violence that were ignored while Russian actions in adjacent regions were condemned. Pogodin noted that when France or England annexed territories, the balance of power was undisturbed, but Russian actions were immediately deemed a threat to peace.

THE CRIMEAN WAR AND REVOLUTIONARY INTERVENTION

The Crimean War stands as the founding trauma of modern Russophobia. It was a war of choice pursued by Britain and France despite the availability of diplomatic compromises like the Vienna Note. The war was driven by moralized hostility and imperial anxiety rather than strategic necessity. The consequences were self-defeating, leading to massive casualties and the entrenchment of an ideological reflex that excluded Russia from normal great-power bargaining.

Following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, Western powers moved from rivalry to active military intervention. Allied forces landed in various regions, including North Russia, Siberia, and the Black Sea, with justifications that shifted from logistics to regime change. These interventions revealed a Western willingness to use force to shape Russia's internal political future. From Moscow's perspective, this confirmed that the West was prepared to ignore Russian sovereignty. Ironically, the presence of foreign-backed forces allowed the Bolsheviks to claim they were defending Russian independence, thereby strengthening their domestic legitimacy.

THE FAILURE OF COLLECTIVE SECURITY

During the interwar period, Europe faced the choice of treating the Soviet state as a legitimate security actor or a permanent outsider. Europe chose the latter. Throughout the 1930s, leading powers repeatedly treated Bolshevism as a greater danger than the rise of Hitler. This ideological hierarchy led to foregone alliances and undermined

deterrence. British and French leaders preferred managing Nazi revisionism over incorporating Soviet power into a collective security system.

Historical evidence demonstrates that the Soviet Union made sustained efforts to build a system of collective security against Nazi Germany. Proposals for mutual assistance and military coordination were repeatedly ignored because Western elites feared that an alliance with Moscow would legitimize Bolshevism. The policy of appeasement was the product of a worldview that treated Nazi revisionism as potentially manageable while viewing Soviet power as inherently subversive. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 was a cynical consequence of the West's long-standing refusal to build collective security with Russia.

THE COLD WAR ARCHITECTURE OF EXCLUSION

In the immediate postwar years, the Allies initially reached a consensus at Potsdam on the demilitarization and democratization of Germany. For the Soviet Union, a neutral and demilitarized Germany was an existential necessity to prevent a third invasion. However, U.S. and British priorities soon shifted toward German economic recovery and political alignment with the West. The creation of the Bizone and the introduction of a separate currency in the western zones made German division functionally irreversible.

The decisive break occurred with the accession of West Germany to NATO in 1955. From the Soviet perspective, this represented the total collapse of the Potsdam settlement. Germany was no longer neutral or demilitarized, but part of a military alliance oriented against the USSR. The Stalin Note of 1952, which offered German reunification based on neutrality, was rejected by the West. Chancellor Adenauer and Western leaders dismissed the offer not because it was insincere, but because neutrality threatened NATO's emerging architecture.

THE POST-COLD WAR ERA AND NATO EXPANSION

The end of the Cold War offered a clear opportunity to escape this destructive cycle. Mikhail Gorbachev proposed a Common European Home based on inclusive and indivisible security. However, the West chose NATO expansion and a security architecture built around Russia rather than with it. While Western leaders claimed no legally binding promises were made, declassified documents show that Soviet leaders were repeatedly told NATO would not move eastward.

NATO expansion directly implicated Russia's core security concerns. Instead of acknowledging these anxieties, European leaders treated Russian objections as illegitimate residues of imperial nostalgia. George Kennan warned in 1997 that NATO expansion would be a fateful error, leading to resentment and revanchism. This strategy reflected a U.S. grand strategy, articulated by Zbigniew Brzezinski, that viewed Russia as a power to be prevented from consolidating influence in Eurasia.

THE UKRAINE CONFLICT AND DIPLOMATIC COLLAPSE

The 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit, which declared that Ukraine and Georgia would become members, crossed a clear Russian red line. U.S. officials were aware that this was perceived as an existential threat in Moscow, yet the warning was ignored. The subsequent crisis in 2014 and the failure of the Minsk II agreements further strained the security architecture. Western leaders later admitted that Minsk II was used primarily to buy time for Ukraine to strengthen its military, confirming Russian suspicions of Western duplicity.

Even after the invasion in February 2022, a negotiated settlement remained possible. In the spring of 2022, Russia and Ukraine engaged in talks in Istanbul that produced a draft framework for Ukrainian neutrality. However, these talks collapsed when the U.S. and U.K. reportedly encouraged Ukraine to continue the conflict. This pattern demonstrates that early settlements are often rejected in favor of continued confrontation, only to reappear later as tragic necessities.

CONCLUSION: THE COST OF REJECTING PEACE

The consequences of ignoring Russian security concerns are now visible in the form of energy shocks, industrial pressures, and a new arms race in Europe. Strategic autonomy has diminished as the continent becomes a theater for great-power confrontation. Most dangerously, the risk of nuclear escalation has returned to the center of European security. Peace in Europe cannot be built by denying the legitimacy of Russian security interests. Until this structural reflex is abandoned, Europe will remain trapped in a self-defeating cycle of rejecting peace when it is available.